

Amendment 49

Catch Level Adjustments and Allocations for Greater Amberjack and Snapper Grouper Recreational Annual Catch Targets

Council Decision Document

March 2022

Background

The most recent assessment of South Atlantic greater amberjack indicated that the stock is not overfished nor undergoing overfishing. The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed SEDAR 59 (2020) during their April 2020 meeting and found that the assessment represented the best scientific information available. The Council received the results of the assessment and the SSC's recommendations for the Overfishing Limit (OFL) and Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) at their June 2020 meeting and directed staff to begin work on a plan amendment to adjust catch level adjustments based on SSC recommendations and SEDAR 59 (2020), and address sector allocations. The Council later added actions addressing management measures to increase equitability and efficiency in the fishery.

An application providing an overview of the fishery, including management history, landings, and assessment information, has been developed and can be found here:

https://data.safmc.net/SA_FisheryDataGreaterAmberjack/.

In 2012, the Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit (ACL) Amendment established ACLs for many species managed through the Council's fishery management plans (FMP). This amendment also established recreational Annual Catch Targets (ACT), values lower than the ACL that establish a precautionary buffer accounting for uncertainty in the recreational catch

estimates. While ACTs were developed and established as part of the management process (thus, they must be changed through plan amendments as the ACL changes), these values were not used in developing regulations and were not included in codified regulatory text. Given their lack of regulatory use, in March 2021, the Council’s Snapper Grouper Committee directed staff to include an action in Amendment 49 that would consider removal of recreational ACTs throughout the Snapper Grouper FMP.

Objectives for this meeting

- Review edited actions and alternatives and provide guidance on necessary changes, additions, or deletions.
- Select/confirm preferred alternatives as necessary.
- Consider approval for public hearings and timing of when hearings would occur.

Actions in this amendment

- Action 1.** Revise the greater amberjack total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield
Action 2. Revise the greater amberjack sector allocations and sector annual catch limits
Action 3. Increase the recreational minimum size limit for greater amberjack
Action 4. Reduce the commercial minimum size limit for greater amberjack
Action 5. Increase the seasonal commercial trip limits for greater amberjack
Action 6. Revise the April spawning closure for greater amberjack
Action 7. Remove recreational annual catch targets from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan

Amendment timing

December 2020	Review options paper and provide guidance to staff
March 2021	Review draft actions and alternatives and approve for scoping
Apr 14 & 15, 2021	Conduct scoping hearings
September 2021	Review scoping comments, review preliminary analyses, and provide guidance to staff
December 2021	Review modifications to the amendment, select preferred alternatives, and provide additional guidance
March 2022	Review modifications to the amendment, select preferred alternatives, and approve for public hearings
June 2022	Conduct public hearing
June 2022	Review public comment and approve all actions
September 2022	Review final draft amendment and consider approval for formal review
Early-Mid 2023	Regulations effective

Draft Purpose and Need

Purpose: The *purpose* of this amendment is to revise the acceptable biological catch and catch limits for greater amberjack in the South Atlantic based on the results of the latest stock assessment; revise sector allocations, minimum size limits, commercial trip limits, and the April spawning closure for greater amberjack; and remove recreational annual catch targets for the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.

Need: The *need* for this amendment is to ensure catch limits are based on the best scientific information available and to ensure overfishing does not occur in the South Atlantic greater amberjack fishery, while increasing social and economic benefits through sustainable and profitable harvest of South Atlantic greater amberjack, consistent with the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and its National Standards. This amendment is also needed to make administrative efforts more efficient by removing recreational annual catch targets, which are not actively used in management, from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.

Committee Action:

REVIEW UPDATED PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENTS AND MODIFY AS NEEDED.

Proposed Actions

Note: for all actions, qualitative effects and analyses are summarized below and more fully described in the March 2022 draft amendment. Analyses will be updated to include more quantitative information, where appropriate, prior to release of the public hearing document.

Action 1. Revise the greater amberjack acceptable biological catch, total annual catch limit, and annual optimum yield

Alternative 1 (No Action). The total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for greater amberjack are equal to the **current** acceptable biological catch (1,968,001 pounds whole weight). The current acceptable biological catch is inclusive of recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program’s Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey.

Preferred Alternative 2. Revise the acceptable biological catch and set it equal to the most recent recommendation from the Scientific and Statistical Committee. Revise the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for greater amberjack and set them equal to the **recommended** acceptable biological catch. The recommended acceptable biological catch is inclusive of recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program’s Fishing Effort Survey. The 2026/2027 total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield would remain in place until modified.

Fishing Year	ABC (lbs ww)	Annual OY (lbs ww)	Total ACL (lbs ww)
2022/2023	4,380,000	4,380,000	4,380,000
2023/2024	3,233,000	3,233,000	3,233,000
2024/2025	2,818,000	2,818,000	2,818,000
2025/2026	2,699,000	2,699,000	2,699,000
2026/2027+	2,669,000	2,669,000	2,669,000

Alternative 3. Revise the acceptable biological catch and set it equal to the most recent recommendation from the Scientific and Statistical Committee. Revise the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for greater amberjack and set them equal to 90% of the **recommended** acceptable biological catch. The recommended acceptable biological catch is inclusive of recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program’s Fishing Effort Survey. The 2026/2027 total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield would remain in place until modified.

Fishing Year	ABC (lbs ww)	Annual OY (lbs ww)	Total ACL (lbs ww)
2022/2023	4,380,000	4,380,000	3,942,000
2023/2024	3,233,000	3,233,000	2,909,700
2024/2025	2,818,000	2,818,000	2,536,200
2025/2026	2,699,000	2,699,000	2,429,100
2026/2027+	2,669,000	2,669,000	2,402,100

Alternative 4. Revise the acceptable biological catch and set it equal to the most recent recommendation from the Scientific and Statistical Committee. Revise the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for greater amberjack and set them equal to 80% of the **recommended** acceptable biological catch. The recommended acceptable biological catch is inclusive of recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program’s Fishing Effort Survey. The 2026/2027 total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield would remain in place until modified.

Fishing Year	ABC (lbs ww)	Annual OY (lbs ww)	Total ACL (lbs ww)
2022/2023	4,380,000	4,380,000	3,504,000
2023/2024	3,233,000	3,233,000	2,586,400
2024/2025	2,818,000	2,818,000	2,254,400
2025/2026	2,699,000	2,699,000	2,159,200
2026/2027+	2,669,000	2,669,000	2,135,200

Discussion

The SSC acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations are based on the results of the SEDAR 59 (2020) greater amberjack stock assessment (Chapter 1). SEDAR 59 (2020) indicates that the greater amberjack ACL can be increased without having negative effects on the sustainability of the stock.

Per the guidance provided at 50 CFR § 600.310(f)(4)(iv), the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) has chosen to specify optimum yield (OY) for greater amberjack on an annual basis and set it equal to the annual catch limit (ACL).

Alternative 1 (No Action) would retain the current ABC, total ACL, and annual OY implemented through Amendment 25 (Comprehensive ACL Amendment) to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper FMP; SAFMC 2011). **Preferred Alternative 2** is based on the Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee’s (SSC) ABC recommendation and would implement ABC=ACL. **Alternatives 3** and **4** would add a 10% and 20% buffer, respectively, between the total ACL and the ABC. For **Preferred Alternative 2** through **Alternative 4**, the ACL in the final year of projections recommended by the SSC (2026-2027) would remain in place until modified by a future amendment.

For **Preferred Alternative 2** through **Alternative 4**, proposed ACLs are based on recreational data from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) calibrated to the Fishing Effort Survey (FES). Future recreational catches under these limits would be monitored by MRIP using the FES.

Average annual total landings of greater amberjack from 2015-2019 calculated using MRIP FES estimates for the recreational fishery were 2.73 million lbs ww.

Alternative 1 (No Action) is not a viable alternative because it would retain the current total ACL for greater amberjack (equal to the current ABC), which was derived using recreational

catch estimates from the MRFSS and is no longer based on the best scientific information available (BSIA). Therefore, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** is not included in effects comparisons.

Summary of Biological Effects:

- When totaling the annual ACL from 2022/2023 through 2026/2027, **Alternative 4** has the lowest cumulative ACL which is expected to have the greatest biological benefits to the stock, followed by **Alternative 3** and **Preferred Alternative 2**.
- South Atlantic greater amberjack have a low release mortality rate of 20% (sensitivity range: 10-30%) (SEDAR 15 2008 and SEDAR 59 2020).

Summary of Economic Effects:

- The potential revised total ACLs for greater amberjack when initially implemented in **Preferred Alternative 2** through **Alternative 4** are all higher than the average observed landings in recent years.
- **Preferred Alternative 2** would have the highest potential net economic benefits, followed by **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 4**.

Summary of Social Effects:

- In general, a higher ACL would lower the chance of triggering a recreational AM and result in the lowest level of negative effects on the recreational sector.
- **Preferred Alternative 2** would be the most beneficial for fishermen, followed by **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 4**.

Committee Action:

- REVIEW ALTERNATIVES UNDER ACTION 1 AND MODIFY AS NECESSARY.
- CONFIRM PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.

Action 2. Revise the greater amberjack sector allocations and sector annual catch limits

Note: The revised sector annual catch limits shown in Table 2.1 reflect the revised total annual catch limit in Preferred Alternative 2 of Action 1. The revised total annual catch limit includes recreational landings from the Marine Recreational Information Program using the Fishing Effort Survey method where appropriate, as well as updates to commercial and headboat landings used in SEDAR 59 (2022).

Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action). Retain the current recreational sector and commercial sector allocations as 59.34% and 40.66%, respectively, of the revised total annual catch limit for greater amberjack.

Alternative 2. Allocate 70.16% of the revised total annual catch limit for greater amberjack to the recreational sector and 29.84% of the revised total annual catch limit for greater amberjack to the commercial sector.

Alternative 3. Allocate 65.00% of the revised total annual catch limit for greater amberjack to the recreational sector and 35.00% of the revised total annual catch limit for greater amberjack to the commercial sector.

Discussion

The allocation percentages in **Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action)** were originally derived by applying the formula: sector annual catch limit = ((mean sector landings 2006-2008)*0.5) + ((mean sector landings 1986-2008)*0.5) to the landings dataset used in the Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit Amendment (Amendment 25 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region), which included recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey. Future recreational catches under **Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action)**, as well as the rest of the Action 2 alternatives, would be monitored via the MRIP FES. Table 1 summarizes the allocation percentages and resulting ACLs for the alternatives considered only for the 2022/2023 fishing year. Table 2 presents this information for the preferred allocation alternative (Alternative 1) for fishing years 2022/2023 through 2026/2027+.

Table 1. Sector allocations for greater amberjack for the three alternatives considered and based on the revised total ACL from **Preferred Alternative 2** in Action 1 for the 2022/2023 fishing year. The commercial ACL is allocated 60% to Season 1 (March-August) and 40% to Season 2 (September-February).

Alternative	Recreational Allocation %	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)	Commercial Allocation of %	Commercial ACL* (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 1 Quota (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 2 Quota** (lbs gw)
1 (No action)	59.34%	2,599,092	40.66%	1,712,412	1,027,447	684,965
2	70.16%	3,073,008	29.84%	1,256,723	754,034	502,689
3	60.00%	2,847,000	35.00%	1,474,038	884,423	589,615

*The total annual catch limit (ACL) is allocated in pounds whole weight (lbs ww) to the commercial and recreational sectors. The commercial allocation is then converted to pounds gutted weight (lbs gw) for regulatory use in the commercial ACL and seasonal quotas.

**Any remaining quota from commercial Season 1 (March-August) transfers to Season 2 (September-February). Remaining quota from Season 2 is not carried forward.

Table 2. Sector annual catch limits (ACL) for greater amberjack based on the revised total ACL from Preferred Alternative 2 in Action 1 and allocation percentages from **Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action)** in Action 2 (59.34% recreational and 40.66% commercial). The commercial ACL is allocated 60% to Season 1 (March-August) and 40% to Season 2 (September-February).

Year	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)	Commercial ACL* (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 1 Quota (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 2 Quota** (lbs gw)
2022/2023	2,599,092	1,712,412	1,027,447	684,965
2023/2024	1,918,462	1,263,979	758,387	505,591
2024/2025	1,672,201	1,101,730	661,038	440,692
2025/2026	1,601,587	1,055,205	633,123	422,082
2026/2027+	1,583,785	1,043,476	626,086	417,391

*The total annual catch limit (ACL) is allocated in pounds whole weight (lbs ww) to the commercial and recreational sectors. The commercial allocation is then converted to pounds gutted weight (lbs gw) for regulatory use in the commercial ACL and seasonal quotas.

**Any remaining quota from commercial Season 1 (March-August) transfers to Season 2 (September-February). Remaining quota from Season 2 is not carried forward.

The allocation percentages in **Alternative 2** are based on applying the formula: sector annual catch limit = ((mean sector landings 2006-2008)*0.5) + ((mean sector landings 1986-2008)*0.5) to a revised dataset that includes Marine Recreational Information Program Fishery Effort Survey estimates.

Table 3. Sector annual catch limits (ACL) for greater amberjack based on the revised total ACL from Preferred Alternative 2 in Action 1 and allocation percentages from **Alternative 2** in Action 2 (70.16% recreational and 29.84% commercial). The commercial ACL is allocated 60% to Season 1 (March-August) and 40% to Season 2 (September-February).

Year	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)	Commercial ACL* (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 1 Quota (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 2 Quota** (lbs gw)
2022/2023	3,073,008	1,256,723	754,034	502,689
2023/2024	2,268,273	927,622	556,573	371,049
2024/2025	1,977,109	808,549	485,130	323,420
2025/2026	1,893,618	774,405	464,643	309,762
2026/2027+	1,872,570	765,798	459,479	306,319

*The total annual catch limit (ACL) is allocated in pounds whole weight (lbs ww) to the commercial and recreational sectors. The commercial allocation is then converted to pounds gutted weight (lbs gw) for regulatory use in the commercial ACL and seasonal quotas.

**Any remaining quota from commercial Season 1 (March-August) transfers to Season 2 (September-February). Remaining quota from Season 2 is not carried forward.

The allocation percentages in **Alternative 3** are approximate midpoints between **Preferred Alternative 1** and **Alternative 2** in Action 2. These percentages are also approximate (rounded to the nearest whole percentage) averages of annual percentages of total landings for each sector from 2010-2019.

Table 4. Sector annual catch limits (ACL) for greater amberjack based on the revised total ACL from Preferred Alternative 2 in Action 1 and allocation percentages from **Alternative 3** in Action 2 (65.00% recreational and 35.00% commercial). The commercial ACL is allocated 60% to Season 1 (March-August) and 40% to Season 2 (September-February).

Year	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)	Commercial ACL* (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 1 Quota (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 2 Quota** (lbs gw)
2022/2023	2,847,000	1,474,038	884,423	589,615
2023/2024	2,101,450	1,088,029	652,817	435,212
2024/2025	1,831,700	948,365	569,019	379,346
2025/2026	1,754,350	908,317	544,990	363,327
2026/2027+	1,734,850	898,221	538,933	359,288

*The total annual catch limit (ACL) is allocated in pounds whole weight (lbs ww) to the commercial and recreational sectors. The commercial allocation is then converted to pounds gutted weight (lbs gw) for regulatory use in the commercial ACL and seasonal quotas.

**Any remaining quota from commercial Season 1 (March-August) transfers to Season 2 (September-February). Remaining quota from Season 2 is not carried forward.

Summary of Analyses

Table 5. Projected closure dates for the greater amberjack recreational sector. Projected closure dates were generated from three different landings scenarios:

- 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2018/2019 - 2020/2021)
- 2) five-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2016/2017 - 2020/2021)
- 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data.

These projections assume the recreational ACLs from Action 1-Preferred Alternative 2 (highest total ACL considered) and Action 2-Preferred Alternative 1 (current sector allocation percentages). **Scenario 1 (three-year average) did not estimate any closures for any future years or allocation alternatives.**

Action 2 Alternative	Year	Recreational ACL	Scenario 2 Closure Date	Scenario 3 Closure Date
1 (Preferred)	2022/2023	2,599,092	None	17-Sep
1 (Preferred)	2024/2025	1,672,201	None	12-Jul
1 (Preferred)	2026/2027	1,583,785	6-Feb	7-Jul

Commercial season 1 (March-August) projections were generated, assuming a commercial ACL from Action 1-Preferred Alternative 2 (highest total ACL considered) and Action 2-Preferred Alternative 1 (current sector allocation percentages), for three different landings scenarios:

- 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2017/2018 - 2019/2020),
- 2) five-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2015/2016 - 2019/2020),
- 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data.

Scenario 1 (three-year average) and Scenario 2 (five-year average) did not estimate any season 1 closures for any future years. Scenario 3 (five-year maximum) estimated closures ranging from August 3 (2026/2027) to no closure.

Commercial season 2 (September-February) projections were generated, assuming a commercial ACL from Action 1-Preferred Alternative 2 (highest total ACL considered) and Action 2-Preferred Alternative 1 (current sector allocation percentages), for two different landings scenarios:

- 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data
- 2) the maximum landings in the last five years.

Scenario 1 (three-year average) and Scenario 2 (five-year maximum) did not estimate any season 2 closures for any future years.

Summary of Biological Effects:

- Biological effects are not expected to be substantially different among **Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Alternatives 2 and 3**, since the allocation percentages would be similar and do not change the total ACL specified in Action 1.
- **Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action)** would allocate the highest percentage to the commercial sector (and lowest percentage to the recreational sector), followed by **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 2**.

Summary of Economic Effects:

- A larger difference between the sector ACL and observed landings would allow for higher potential landings and reduce the likelihood of restrictive AMs being triggered that would lead to short-term negative economic effects.
- From a short-term economic perspective, **Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action)** would have the highest potential economic benefit for the commercial sector, followed by **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 2**.
- From a short-term economic perspective, **Alternative 2** would have the highest potential economic benefit for the recreational sector, followed by **Alternative 3** and **Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Summary of Social Effects:

- Projections for Action 1 – Preferred Alternative 2 indicate that the commercial ACL for greater amberjack would not be reached under the any of the alternatives proposed in Action 2.
- Based on projected date of closure and earlier closures having greater negative social impacts, **Alternative 2** is expected to have the least negative social impact on the recreational fishery, followed by **Alternative 3** and **Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Committee Action:

- REVIEW ALTERNATIVES UNDER ACTION 2 AND MODIFY AS NECESSARY.
- CONFIRM PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.

Action 3. Increase the recreational minimum size limit for greater amberjack

Alternative 1 (No Action). The recreational minimum size limit is 28 inches fork length.

Preferred Alternative 2. Increase the recreational minimum size limit to 30 inches fork length.

Alternative 3. Increase the recreational minimum size limit to 32 inches fork length.

Alternative 4. Increase the recreational minimum size limit to 36 inches fork length.

Discussion:

- Minimum size limits for the commercial and recreational sectors (Amendment 4, 1991):
 - Commercial: 36-inch fork length.
 - Recreational: 28-inch fork length.

Summary of Analyses

Table 6. Calculated percent reductions of South Atlantic recreational greater amberjack landings for each of the Amendment 49 Action 3 alternatives. These estimates include both MRIP and headboat landings estimates, with weighting according to percent contribution of each data set to landings from 2015 to 2020.

Action 3 Alternative	Size Limit (Inches FL)	Weighted Percent Reduction (%)
1	28	0.0
2 (Preferred)	30	7.6
3	32	14.7
4	36	35.1

Council rationale from the December 2021 meeting considered the size at maturity in selecting a preferred minimum size limit. After further investigation, it was noticed that the maturity schedule was revised in the most recent stock assessment (SEDAR 59 2020), rather than that referenced at the December 2021 meeting from the previous assessment (SEDAR 15 2008). The most current maturity schedule is shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Age, fork length, and percent of mature females for South Atlantic greater amberjack. Source: SEDAR 59 (2020).

Age	Fork Length (in)	Female Maturity
1	19.6	53%
2	25.0	89%
3	29.1	99%
4	32.1	100%
5	34.4	100%

Recreational season projections were generated, assuming a total ACL from Action 1-Preferred Alternative 2 (highest total ACL considered) and combined effects of each allocation alternative from Action 2 (sector allocations) and each increased recreational minimum size limit from Action 3, for three different landings scenarios:

- 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2018/2019 - 2020/2021)
- 2) five-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2016/2017 - 2020/2021)
- 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data.

Scenario 1 (three-year average) and Scenario 2 (five-year average) did not estimate any recreational closures for any future years under any Action 3 alternatives. Scenario 3 (five-year maximum) estimated closures delayed from those shown in Table 5 and ranging from July 20 to no closure.

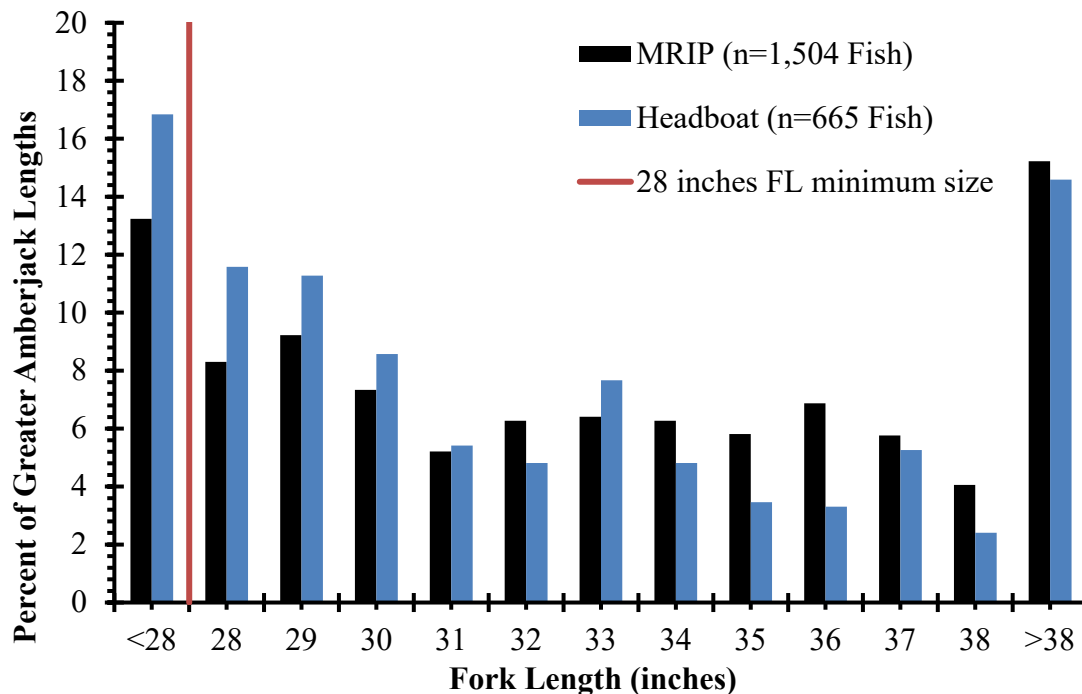


Figure 1. Length distribution of greater amberjack landed recreationally from 2015 through 2020 in the private-charter component (black bars) and the headboat component (blue bars). The orange line represents the current recreational minimum size limit of 28 inches FL.

Source: MRIP and Southeast Region Headboat Survey.

Summary of Biological Effects

- An increased recreational minimum size limit is expected to reduce fishing mortality from recreational landings due to more fish being released as undersized. SEDAR 59 (2020) estimated release mortality for both sectors to be 20%.
- Biological effects to the stock from **Preferred Alternative 2, Alternative 3, and Alternative 4** could be beneficial relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Summary of Economic Effects

- In general, the larger the size limit, the more that overall harvest will decrease in the short-term, thereby decreasing net economic benefits incurred from such harvest.
- The highest recreational economic benefits would occur under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, followed by **Preferred Alternative 2, Alternative 3, and Alternative 4**.

Summary of Social Effects

- There is a social trade-off with increasing the recreational minimum size limit (**Alternatives 2 through 4**):
 - A decrease in the harvest rate from a larger minimum size limit can decrease recreational trip satisfaction (negative social effect).
 - A decrease in the harvest rate from a larger minimum size limit can also decrease the chance of landings reaching the ACL and triggering accountability measures (AM) earlier in the season (positive social effect).

Committee Action:

- REVIEW ALTERNATIVES UNDER ACTION 3 AND MODIFY AS NECESSARY.
- CONFIRM PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.

Action 4. Reduce the commercial minimum size limit for greater amberjack

Alternative 1 (No Action). The commercial minimum size limit is 36 inches fork length.

Alternative 2. Reduce the commercial minimum size limit to 32 inches fork length.

Preferred Alternative 3. Reduce the commercial minimum size limit to 30 inches fork length.

Alternative 4. Reduce the commercial minimum size limit to 28 inches fork length.

Discussion

- Minimum size limits for the commercial and recreational sectors (Amendment 4, 1991):
 - Commercial: 36-inch fork length.
 - Recreational: 28-inch fork length.
- Consideration of a reduced commercial minimum size limit was recommended during public scoping and from the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) at their April 2021 meeting.
 - Rationale for consideration include:
 - Increased equity between the sectors.
 - Longer times needed to bring larger fish onboard. Longer boarding times reduce trip efficiency, increase risk of injury to the fish (which would be released if below the minimum size limit), and may serve as an attractant for sharks, potentially leading to depredation.
 - Increased risk of injury to fishermen and fish when trying to bring larger greater amberjack onboard. Injuries to the fish can impact release survival.
 - Smaller greater amberjack are more commercially desirable.
 - The stock assessment indicates that the greater amberjack biomass is above the biomass that would achieve maximum sustainable yield. Thus, the population could possibly sustain harvest of smaller fish.

Council rationale from the December 2021 meeting considered the size at maturity in selecting a preferred minimum size limit. After further investigation, it was noticed that the maturity schedule was revised in the most recent stock assessment (SEDAR 59 2020), rather than that referenced at the December 2021 meeting from the previous assessment (SEDAR 15 2008). The most current maturity schedule is shown in Table 7.

Summary of Analyses

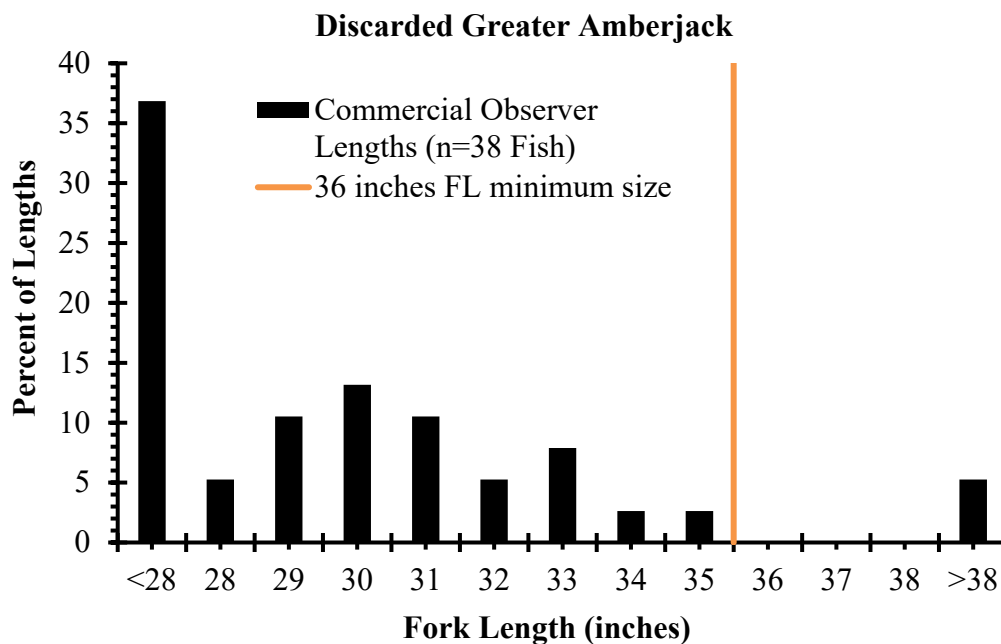


Figure 2. Length distribution (fork length) of greater amberjack landed from released fish in the commercial sector from 2018 through 2020 in 1-inch length increments. The orange line represents the current commercial minimum size limit of 36 inches fork length.

Source: Commercial observer program (started in the South Atlantic region in 2018).

Summary of Biological Effects:

- Reducing the current 36-inch FL commercial minimum size limit for greater amberjack under **Alternative 2, Preferred Alternative 3, or Alternative 4** could be expected to reduce commercial discards and release mortality.
- Reducing the commercial minimum size limit could also increase the commercial harvest rate. However, overall harvest and fishing mortality would still be limited by the commercial ACL.

Summary of Economic Effects:

- In general, the lower the size limit, the more that overall harvest will increase, thereby increasing economic benefits incurred from such harvest.
- The highest commercial economic benefits would occur under **Alternative 4**, followed by **Preferred Alternative 3, Alternative 2, and Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Summary of Social Effects:

- There is a social trade-off with reducing the commercial minimum size limit (**Alternative 2, Preferred Alternative 3, and Alternative 4**):
 - An increase in the harvest rate from a smaller minimum size limit can increase commercial trip profitability (positive social effect).

- An increase in the harvest rate from a smaller minimum size limit can also increase the chance of landings reaching the ACL and triggering AMs earlier in the season (negative social effect).

Committee Action:

- REVIEW ALTERNATIVES UNDER ACTION 4 AND MODIFY AS NECESSARY.
- CONFIRM PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.

Action 5. Increase the seasonal commercial trip limits for greater amberjack

Alternative 1 (No Action). The March 1 through August 31 (Season 1) commercial trip limit is 1,200 pounds gutted or whole weight for greater amberjack, and the September 1 through the end of February (Season 2) commercial trip limit is 1,000 pounds gutted or whole weight.

Alternative 2. Increase the March 1 through August 31 (Season 1) commercial trip limit for greater amberjack to be:

Sub-Alternative 2a. 1,500 pounds gutted or whole weight.

Sub-Alternative 2b. 2,000 pounds gutted or whole weight.

Sub-Alternative 2c. 2,500 pounds gutted or whole weight.

Alternative 3. Increase the September 1 through the end of February (Season 2) commercial trip limit for greater amberjack to be:

Sub-Alternative 3a. 1,200 pounds gutted or whole weight.

Sub-Alternative 3b. 1,500 pounds gutted or whole weight.

Sub-Alternative 3c. 2,000 pounds gutted or whole weight.

Sub-Alternative 3d. 2,500 pounds gutted or whole weight.

Discussion

- The commercial ACL is allocated into two quotas: 60% to the period March 1 through August 31 (Season 1) and 40% to the period September 1 through the end of February (Season 2) (Regulatory Amendment 27 2019). Any remaining quota from Season 1 transfers to Season 2. Any remaining quota from Season 2 is not carried forward.
 - The Season 1 commercial trip limit is 1,200 pounds, and the Season 2 commercial trip limit is 1,000 pounds.
- During April each year, no person may sell or purchase a greater amberjack harvested from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone and the harvest and possession limit is one per person per day or one per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive.
- Prior to Regulatory Amendment 27, the commercial trip limit was 1,200 pounds year-round. Rationale for changing the trip limit (along with implementation of the commercial split season):
 - [The approved split season and seasonal trip limits] “would strike a balance between improved access to the greater amberjack resource for fishermen throughout the region and economic profitability. Fishermen in Florida target greater amberjack early in the fishing year, when they can also fish for other jacks species; whereas, in the fall, greater amberjack schools are found off North

Carolina. Hence, allocating a smaller portion of the ACL at a higher trip limit early in the year and a larger portion of the ACL at a lower trip limit during the latter part of the year ensures access and profitability to fishermen throughout the region and allows for the entire ACL to be harvested.”

Summary of Analyses

Commercial season 1 (March-August) projections were generated, assuming a commercial ACL from Action 1-Preferred Alternative 2 (highest total ACL considered) and Action 2-Preferred Alternative 1 (current sector allocation percentages) and each of the commercial season 1 trip limits from Action 5, for three different landings scenarios:

- 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2017/2018-2019/2020)
- 2) five-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2015/2016-2019/2020)
- 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data.

Scenario 1 (three-year average) and Scenario 2 (five-year average) did not estimate any season 1 closures for any future years. Scenario 3 (five-year maximum) estimated closures ranging from July 3 (Action 5-Sub-Alternative 2c, 2026/2027) to no closure.

Commercial season 2 (September-February) projections were generated, assuming a commercial ACL from Action 1-Preferred Alternative 2 (highest total ACL considered) and Action 2-Preferred Alternative 1 (current sector allocation percentages) and each of the commercial season 2 trip limits from Action 5, for two different landings scenarios:

- 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data
- 2) the maximum landings in the last five years.

Scenario 1 (three-year average) did not estimate any season 2 closures for any future years. Scenario 2 (five-year maximum) estimated closures ranging from February 8 (Action 5-Sub-Alternative 3d, 2026/2027) to no closure.

Summary of Biological Effects

- Under all alternatives, overall harvest and fishing mortality would still be constrained by the commercial ACL and seasonal quotas.
- An increase in the commercial trip limit under **Alternative 2** or **Alternative 3** could be expected to result in an increased harvest rate compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.
- An increased harvest rate due to an increased trip limit (**Alternative 2** or **Alternative 3**) could be expected to increase overall harvest and fishing mortality, based on the two most recent years of landings (2018/2019 and 2019/2020) being below the commercial ACL and the intended effect of the commercial split season to reduce the harvest rate, beginning with the 2020/2021 fishing season.
- However, because commercial harvest is still constrained by the ACL, and AMs are in place to prevent the ACL from being exceeded, any increase in harvest should not result in adverse biological consequences to the stock. Therefore, the biological effects to the stock from **Alternative 2** or **Alternative 3** could be neutral relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Summary of Economic Effects

- The revised commercial sector ACL for greater amberjack is not expected to be fully harvested under most ACLs considered (Action 2).
- Therefore, the total net economic effects are expected to be higher for greater seasonal commercial trip limits under **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3**, in comparison to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Summary of Social Effects

- **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** would be expected to provide social benefits of greater landings and increased trip efficiency.
- Projections indicate that the commercial ACLs for greater amberjack (Action 2) would not be reached under the any of the alternatives proposed in Action 2; thus, there is likely a low probability of negative social effects from a commercial closure.

Committee Action:

- REVIEW ALTERNATIVES UNDER ACTION 5 AND MODIFY AS NECESSARY.
- SELECT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.

Action 6. Revise the April spawning closure for greater amberjack

Alternative 1 (No Action). During April each year, no person may sell or purchase a greater amberjack harvested from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone and the harvest and possession limit is one per person per day or one per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive.

Alternative 2. Specify during April each year, no person may sell or purchase, harvest or possess a greater amberjack from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone and the harvest and possession limit is zero.

Alternative 3. Remove the April spawning closure for greater amberjack. Allow purchase, harvest, and possession of greater amberjack from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone according to regulations specified for the rest of the year.

Discussion

- During April, each year, possession of greater amberjack on commercial or for-hire (charter and headboat) vessels is limited to one per person per day or one per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive. This limit is the same as the recreational bag limit; however, commercial and recreational vessels are still subject to their respective sector-specific minimum size limit (36 inches fork length for commercial; 28 inches fork length for recreational).
- The spawning closure was implemented through Amendment 9 as an expansion of the original closure established south of Cape Canaveral, FL, through Amendment 4. Council rationale for the expansion of the original closure included concern about the status of greater amberjack and uncertainty about the 1996 NMFS stock assessment.
- Also during April, commercial sale or purchase of greater amberjack from the South Atlantic region is prohibited.
- **Alternative 2** would expand the April spawning closure, such that all harvest and possession of greater amberjack (including both recreational and commercial sectors) would be prohibited in April.
- Consideration of expanding the spawning closure to prohibit all harvest of greater amberjack in April was recommended by the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) at their April 2021 meeting.
 - Rationale for consideration include:
 - Increased equity between the sectors.
 - Additional biological/reproductive benefit to the stock from reduced harvest during spawning.
- **Alternative 3** would remove the April spawning closure, such that all harvest and possession of greater amberjack (including both recreational and commercial sectors) would be allowed in April according to regulations specified for the rest of the year.

Summary of Analyses

Recreational season projections were generated, assuming a total ACL from Action 1-Preferred Alternative 2 (highest total ACL considered), various allocation alternatives from Action 2,

various recreational minimum size limits from Action 3, and closure of the recreational sector in April (Action 6-Alternative 2), for three different landings scenarios:

- 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2018/2019 - 2020/2021)
- 2) five-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2016/2017 - 2020/2021)
- 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data.

Scenario 1 (three-year average) and Scenario 2 (five-year average) did not estimate any seasonal recreational closures for any future years with an April recreational closure (Action 6-Alternative 2). Scenario 3 (five-year maximum) estimated closures delayed from those shown in Table 1 and ranging from July 23 to no closure.

Commercial season 1 (March-August) projections were generated, assuming a commercial ACL from Action 1-Preferred Alternative 2 (highest total ACL considered) and Action 2-Preferred Alternative 1 (current sector allocation percentages), each of the commercial season 1 trip limits from Action 5, and April being open to commercial harvest (Action 6-Alternative 3), for three different landings scenarios:

- 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2017/2018 - 2019/2020)
- 2) five-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2015/2016 - 2019/2020)
- 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data.

Scenario 1 (three-year average) and Scenario 2 (five-year average) did not estimate any season 1 closures for any future years. Scenario 3 (five-year maximum) estimated closures ranging from May 23 to no closure.

Summary of Biological Effects

- Under either **Alternative 1 (No Action)** or **Alternative 2**, additional protection is afforded to the stock in April, during the peak spawning.
- While both alternatives offer some protection to the stock, overall, **Alternative 2** would indirectly provide the greatest biological benefit to the greater amberjack stock compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, due to reduced fishing mortality from harvest.
- **Alternative 3** would be expected to have negative biological effects due to a likely increase in fishing mortality during spawning, a time when historical information indicates that greater amberjack could be more easily caught.

Summary of Economic Effects

- **Alternative 2** is expected to result in reduced harvest and reduced economic benefits for the recreational sector, compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.
- Differences in economic effects on the commercial sector between **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Alternative 2** are expected to be minimal due to the current prohibition on commercial sale in April.
- **Alternative 3** is expected to provide the greatest economic benefit to the commercial sector due to a longer time period when greater amberjack can be harvested.

Summary of Social Effects

- Assuming that closing harvest during spawning ensures sustainable harvest of greater amberjack, long-term benefits to fishing communities in the form of consistent access to the resource would be highest under **Alternative 2**.

- Short-term negative effects on fishing communities due to restrictions in fishing opportunities would be lowest under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Such negative effects would have a greater impact on the recreational sector than the commercial sector due to current regulations that already prohibit commercial sale and reduce allowable commercial harvest.
- **Alternative 3** would provide benefits in the form of increased fishing opportunities for the commercial sector, but may also result in negative effects if the increased fishing reduces availability of greater amberjack or shortens the length of the commercial season.

Committee Action:

- REVIEW ALTERNATIVES UNDER ACTION 6 AND MODIFY AS NECESSARY.
- SELECT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.

Action 7. Remove recreational annual catch targets from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan

Alternative 1 (No Action). Retain recreational annual catch targets for species managed under the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region.

Preferred Alternative 2. Remove recreational annual catch targets for species managed under the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region.

Discussion

- Recreational annual catch targets (ACTs) for the Snapper Grouper FMP, established through the Comprehensive ACL Amendment, have been in place since 2012, are not codified, and are not used for management purposes. **Preferred Alternative 2** would remove the need for ACTs to be evaluated and changed when changes are made to the recreational ACL.
- Some recreational ACTs are applied to individual species, while others are applied to species complexes. **Preferred Alternative 2** would remove ACTs from both individual species and complexes.

Summary of Effects

- There are no expected biological, economic, or social effects associated with removal of the ACTs as they are not connected to any AMs or other management functions (**Preferred Alternative 2**).
- Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, recreational ACTs must be specified whenever recreational ACLs change. However, because the recreational ACT alternatives as they are presented here do not trigger any corrective or preventative action, no additional in-season monitoring is required regardless of where the recreational ACT level is set. Therefore, administrative burden is expected to be reduced in a small amount under **Preferred Alternative 2**, compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Committee Action:

- CONFIRM PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.
- CONSIDER APPROVAL FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS.
 - SCHEDULE PUBLIC HEARINGS
 - IPT recommends holding public hearings at the June 2022 Council Meeting. Due to the addition of new alternatives in December 2021 and the request for analyses looking at interactive effects of multiple actions, some additional time to finalize analyses, summarize effects, and compare alternatives before publishing the Public Hearing Document would be helpful.

Appendix 1. Recommended Acceptable Biological Catch and Overfishing Limit for Greater Amberjack

The SSC reviewed SEDAR 59 (2020) during their April 2020 meeting and found that the assessment addressed the terms of reference appropriately, was conducted using the best scientific information available, is adequate for determining stock status and supporting fishing level recommendations, and the methods to address uncertainty were consistent with expectations and available information. The SSC recommended revising the OFL based on projections under a fishing mortality rate that would produce maximum sustainable yield ($F = F_{MSY}$) and applied the ABC control rule to recommend the ABC for greater amberjack. These recommendations were updated to account for additional projections from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) that applied management from 2022 through 2026 (Table 1.5.1). Discards were projected as separate values from the landings shown in Table 1.5.1.

When developing options for ACLs, years for annual ABCs were considered to apply to the start of the non-calendar fishing year used for greater amberjack (March-February). For example, the 2022 ABC from Table 1.5.1 would be used to define the ACL for the March 2022-February 2023 fishing year.

Table A1. South Atlantic greater amberjack OFL and ABC recommendations, in pounds whole weight (lbs ww), based on projections from SEDAR 59 (2020). The assessment and these projections use recreational data calibrated to the MRIP FES.

Year	OFL (lbs ww)	ABC (lbs ww)
2022	4,615,000	4,380,000
2023	3,283,000	3,233,000
2024	2,839,000	2,818,000
2025	2,719,000	2,699,000
2026	2,691,000	2,669,000